yours always

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yours always

by stereobone

Summary

Bucky starts getting letters from a secret admirer and Gale has never been acting stranger.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Bucky is sat in the grass, staring out at the airfield when the envelope lands in his lap.

"You got mail, Bucky," Crank says.

Bucky blinks down at his name written out in loopy cursive. *Major John Egan.* There's no return address. Mail call comes every week unless there's a delay from the war, and there often is. But mail call is sacred. All the men slink off to shadowed corners of the base to read letters from their wives or their sweethearts. Covet the smell of their perfume and the honeyed words inside. The poor suckers who don't have anyone like that either write to their mothers or don't get letters at all.

Bucky is one of those poor suckers.

He doesn't mind. He'd complained about it once to Gale when they were biking home from the pub, drunk and feeling sorry for himself. *Must be real nice*, he'd said, *to have something like that to wait for*. Gale's eyes cut to him in the dark. *You'll find that one day,* he said, and Bucky laughed. He doesn't know why he laughed. It made Gale watch him for longer, like he was worried Bucky was going to keep biking and never stop.

And now he's got a letter in his lap. Bucky breaks the seal with his thumb and pulls a slip of paper out. The same loopy cursive is inside, handwriting he doesn't recognize. Bucky looks up, but Crank is already walking back towards the mess hall. He reads.

Dear John Egan,

I saw you at the pub last week, but I must confess I was too shy to approach as you were with your fellow airmen. You looked very handsome in your uniform. You made everyone laugh, something we all need right now. And while we will likely never meet, I simply couldn't bear to not write you. I'll watch the skies thinking of you and your smile. Please do be safe.

Yours Always,
A Secret Admirer

Bucky rereads the letter three times. He sniffs the paper and it just smells like paper. He tucks the letter back into its envelope, smiling so hard it hurts a little, then takes the opportunity of everyone being distracted to tuck it into his foot locker.

Gale is the first person he tells. Bucky crowds him outside the mess hall as they're about to line up for dinner and tugs him around the side of the building despite Gale griping that they're going to miss out on the pork chops. The pork chops aren't even very good. But Gale gets grouchy when he misses dinner, in Bucky's opinion anyway.

"Buck, Buck, listen," he says, arm looped around Gale's neck.

He pulls the letter out from his jacket and hands it over to him. Gale frowns, brows furrowing. As he reads the letter, his brows crawl up to his hairline. The toothpick he was chewing on falls out of his mouth.

"Bucky Egan, I'll be damned," he says. "You've got a secret admirer."

Gale smiles in that perfect, effortlessly handsome way he always does, blue eyes shining in the darkness. Bucky lets him hold onto the letter a moment. Wants him to. It's not that Gale has ever once made him feel like he has to prove something to him. When it comes to Gale, Bucky always has a dogged need to hold onto his attention, to have things that are just theirs.

"Have you shown the boys?" Gale asks.

"Nah, not yet." Bucky plucks the letter from Gale's hand. "Can't have them getting jealous about my secret admirer right before a mission."

He's laying it on thick, he knows he is. The truth is, Bucky is half-convinced this is someone playing a prank on him. Only the longer the day has gone on, no one's asked him about the letter, and he's starting to think this might be real.

"Besides, it's only one letter. She didn't even perfume it."

Gale shrugs a shoulder as Bucky tucks the letter into his jacket.

"Still got a letter," he says, which gets Bucky smiling again.

"Yeah, I'll say."

They get back in line and manage to snag the last two pork chops. They eat with secret smiles, boots knocking together under the table,

and almost forget that tomorrow is a mission day.

Bucky had told Gale to write him a letter the night before he shipped out. He was drunk when he said it, so Gale laughed, their bodies pressed close outside the bar while Bucky smoked a cigarette. Gale has a deep, reserved laugh. It took Bucky a week to get it out of him when they'd first met, another week to realize he was the only one who could. Somehow, Bucky had found a way to crack Gale's perfectly constructed defenses.

"I'm serious," Bucky had said, head rolling against the brick wall. "I want a letter from you."

Gale rolled his eyes, smiling hard enough that he showed his perfect teeth. Bucky wanted to kiss him. He'd started wanting that sometime during flight school and the feeling had never gone away. And the way Gale was watching him, like he'd never be as fond of anyone as he was of Bucky, almost made him stupid enough to try. Then he remembered that Gale thought he wasn't serious about writing him a letter. Thought Bucky was being drunk and silly, just winding him up.

"You'd probably write lousy letters anyway," Bucky said. "Tell me all about how you starched your underwear or something."

"I don't starch my—"

"I bet you do a cold cream mask before bed."

Gale socked him on the shoulder. Not hard, but Bucky was drunk enough that he stumbled, and Gale caught him in his arms, walked him towards the street to get him back safely.

He knew Gale wasn't going to write. He still lined up those first few weeks at mail call anyway, teeth worrying at his lip.

The next letter comes two weeks later. Bucky isn't exactly waiting for the mail to show up, he's just aware of the day, the time, the way he's aware of his body touching solid ground after being in the air, or the soft press of Gale's hand on his back when he's had too much to drink and needs to be anchored.

Then Bucky gets his mail call, and he bites his cheek to stop from smiling. The envelope is marked exactly as last time: no return address, Bucky's name written out in loopy cursive. He goes to his bunk to open the letter this time and is immediately hit with the smell of perfume, something citrusy and a little earthy. Nearly rips the envelope trying to get the letter out and unfolded.

Dear John Egan,

I told myself not to write you again, but I found it impossible. Last week I watched the sky nearly every day and looked for you despite knowing I wouldn't see you. I still felt you in my heart. You must think that's a very silly thing to hear from a woman you've never met. Maybe I am a silly woman. As you know, we had an air raid over the weekend, and I thought I might die, huddled in the shelter all helpless. Then it was over, and I am still alive. No better reason to write to a handsome man than that.

She still doesn't give her name. Bucky sniffs the letter again. He grabs the first from his foot locker and goes marching straight outside to where Gale, Curt, and DeMarco are standing together and talking.

"Boys!" Bucky says. "It's official—I'm driving the women of England crazy."

"What are you—" Curt starts, then sputters when Bucky waves the two letters in their faces.

"She sent another letter, Buck," Bucky says. "Perfumed it this time and everything."

Gale smiles at him, cheeks rounding. Curt follows the trajectory of the letters with his eyes because Bucky can't stop waving them around before DeMarco finally snatches them out of Bucky's hands.

"Who from? Your mother?"

They all huddle back together and start reading. Bucky reads again even though he's already read the first letter over a dozen times, the second one four. Curt reads aloud under his breath, accent kind of taking the romance out.

"Holy shit," he says. "Some gal fell in love with you at the pub? Didn't even talk to you?"

"Lucky dog," DeMarco says.

Gale says nothing.

Curt sniffs the second letter. "Jesus, she spritzed it with Chantilly. Classy lady."

Bucky takes the letters back, feeling oddly protective of them.

"Stop that, you're gonna got your snot nose all over 'em."

"Too bad she didn't leave a name," DeMarco says. "Guess you can spend some alone time with her letters, though."

He waggles his eyebrows from behind his aviators. It kind of takes the energy out of Bucky for a moment, remembering that he doesn't have a name or address to go on. He doesn't even have initials. All he knows is that she spotted him at the pub, and that might be enough. At the very least, it's enough of an excuse for them all to go out and leave the somber air of the base for a bit.

"Gentlemen, we've got passes for tomorrow," Bucky says. "Now we've got a mission. I say we go to the pub and try and find her."

Gale glances at DeMarco and Curt, then takes a toothpick out from his silver case and sticks it between his teeth.

"Bucky, it sounds like she wants to admire you from afar."

Bucky smacks his lips and musses Gale's hair, shaking it out of its hold on purpose.

"Or, Buck, or she might see me and be so overtaken by my good looks that she reveals herself."

Gale gives him a look, the look he always gives when Bucky is being impossible, and he knows he's not going to talk him out of it. Bucky is the only one who can ever get Gale to pull that look out. He loves doing it. Loves riling Gale up, because he's so buttoned up and together and Bucky knows that deep down, deep down he has something wild in him. He wouldn't be flying forts if he didn't.

They all look at Gale now, because it's his word they're waiting on, even if Bucky knows he's already caved.

"Just don't be disappointed if she doesn't show," Gale finally says, to everyone whooping in delight.

His hair is still loose from its hold and tumbling around his face. Bucky fights off the urge to push back for him.

Half the night it's him, Curt, and DeMarco shoved together at a table picking out perspective would-be secret admirers. Gale politely drinks a ginger beer and doesn't participate. Every pretty woman who walks close, Curt or DeMarco slaps Bucky's shoulder and says, "Her, it's her, I bet it's her." Bucky shakes his head every time.

"Nah," he says. "Doesn't feel right."

"What are you talking about?" DeMarco says. "She's gorgeous."

Bucky takes a slow sip of his whiskey. The woman DeMarco is referring to *is* gorgeous. A stunning brunette in a navy-blue dress with curves and dark red lipstick. He can just tell she's not the one.

"This girl is a blonde, I'm telling you," he says. "Blonde, and—and—smart. Sensitive."

There's silence from the table. Makes the pub seem louder, smoke curling over them, the bark of laughter cut by English accents. Bucky feels like he just said something stupid. Gale is watching him with his ginger beer halfway to his lips.

"Jesus," Curt says. "You in love with her or something?"

"*No*," Bucky says. "You can just tell that kind of thing. Back me up here, Buck."

Gale throws the rest of his ginger beer back like it's a shot.

"Wouldn't know." He digs into his breast pocket for a toothpick. "I've never gotten a letter from a secret admirer."

Bucky waves him off. He knows what he's talking about. A woman doesn't write about feeling alive like that unless she's smart and sensitive. The blonde thing is…Bucky doesn't have a good answer for

that one. He's not letting it go, though.

He and Curt end up taking a lap around the pub later after Curt suggests he gets close enough to a woman to see if he can smell Chantilly on her. With how much whiskey he's had, Bucky thinks it's a brilliant idea. The problem is that the whole pub smells like smoke and spirits, and everyone's perfume and cologne has mixed together. Bucky passes a few women and isn't sure what he smells. Nothing tickles like citrus, like earth. It's depressing. He abandons Curt and has another drink at the bar, body heavy against the bar top, until he feels Gale's arm drape around his shoulders.

"Hey," Gale says, the rumble of his voice tickling Bucky's ear. "It's time to go, Bucky. Come on."

Bucky is a ragdoll against him all the way back to the base. He lets Gale lead them back to the their quarters, their arms around each other. When they'd left for the night, Bucky had told himself it was a long shot, a woman that shy revealing herself, or even being at the pub at all. He'd gotten his hopes up anyway. It's a John Egan trademark. Gale is watching him now as they dress down for bed like he knows.

"Don't say it," Bucky tells him.

"Fine, I won't," Gale says.

Bucky hangs up his jacket, then turns and pats the apple of Gale's cheek.

"At least I know you like me."

"Do I?" says Gale.

His cheek rounds further under Bucky's hand. Bucky grabs it and pinches, still amazed that Gale lets him touch him like this, doesn't push him away, doesn't ask him to stop. He lets Bucky touch him almost like he wants the touch as much as Bucky wants to give it.

They separate to brush their teeth. Bucky dreams that night of blonde hair, the smell of Chantilly, Gale watching him through the smoke of the pub.

They lose forty men on the next mission. Gale takes a cut to the head from some flak and comes out of his fort bloody and Bucky's heart drops to his feet and he can't pick it up until he's sure the cut is superficial.

"I'm okay, Bucky," Gale keeps saying. "I'm alright."

There's blood on his scarf, bright red on sky blue. Bucky wants to touch him and for the first time, can't seem to. He stands there with his hands clenched to fists while the medics try and coax a mulish Gale into the ambulance. It's not until later, when Gale is cleaned up, that Bucky feels it's safe to touch him again, rag on him for making such a big deal about a little cut. He's sitting in one of the infirmary beds and Bucky never wants to see him there again.

"You might scare a guy, you know," Bucky tells him. "Coming out of your fort all bloody like that when it's just a scratch."

"Which guy?" Gale asks, smiling, a big awful bandage taped to the side of his head.

"Hell if I know," Bucky says, and has to look away from him.

Another letter comes the next week:

Confession: I saw you through the window of the pub. You looked as handsome as the first time I'd laid eyes on you. But I was so overwhelmed at the thought of you discovering me that I went straight home. Perhaps that's for the best. I like you as a mystery, John Egan. I'm quite certain you will only approve of me as one as well. Shall I tell you about my week? Less exciting than yours, I'm sure. Maybe the mundane might be just what you need right now.

She writes about milking the cows, the smell of fresh butter on bread, how she's terrible at dancing. The letter is perfumed again. There's something sweet about it, how she writes as if the outside world is Bucky's to enjoy for a while. Makes him forget for a moment that they're losing more men than they are dropping bombs and that morale is at all time low. He almost wants to keep the letter to himself.

He shows it off anyway.

"She's toying with you," Crank says.

"I think it's really sweet," Croz says. "Right, Bubbles?"

Bubbles agrees from his bed, sick again. They're in the infirmary gossiping like hens about it. Bucky slaps the letter to Gale's chest and says, "She's a terrible dancer, just like you, Buck. Maybe you're related."

Gale frowns at him and doesn't take the letter. Crank snatches it back.

"She's writing to you about cows and weather patterns," he says. "It's not very romantic."

"Oh, what do you know?" Bubbles says. "Cows are plenty romantic."

Bucky gets another letter shortly after that:

John Egan, maybe you think I'm only writing to you to pass the time. That I don't dream about kissing you. Having you hold me close. I do, please know that I do.

There's a kiss mark at the bottom of the letter in pale pink lipstick that Bucky is sorely tempted to press his lips to.

The whole base goes wild over the letter. No one has ever gotten a kiss mark in a letter before, and it's suddenly all anyone can talk about over lunch. Men keep coming by and asking to see letter. Bucky pulls it from his jacket pocket where he's keeping it safe in its envelope. There's whistling and howling. He'd shown Gale first, he always shows Gale first, but he didn't seem very impressed by the kiss mark. He's sitting across from Bucky now, scraping apart his baked potato and chewing with his jaw clenched.

"You good?" Bucky asks.

"Fine," Gale says, like he really is fine.

Harding comes by and asks to see the infamous kiss mark. Gale takes another bite of his potato and is out of his seat with his tray by the time Bucky's unfolded the letter.

He convinces Gale to come to the pub with him because the mail is

delayed, and their missions keep failing and everyone is on edge. It honestly doesn't take a whole lot of convincing. Gale is completely devoted to his men, their wellbeing, and that includes Bucky. He joins him for a night out but tells him not to expect anything, not to expect his secret admirer to suddenly show her face. Bucky strokes his chin outside the pub. He might already be a little drunk. He feels like he's drunk more than he's sober, lately.

"Major Cleven, my little realist," he says. "Always keeping me grounded."

"Well, you need it," Gale says, trying to hide his smile. "Got your head in the clouds."

"Right where I like it," Bucky says. "Don't act like you don't love your head up there neither."

They head inside and Bucky proceeds to get even drunker. Gale doesn't stop him. He watches him through his lashes while he nurses a ginger beer, and it drives Bucky crazy. Drives him crazy that he can't have Gale, can't have the woman who's been writing him all these letters, can't save his men who've been dropping like flies getting swatted by a huge German hand.

Bucky goes up to the bar for another round and bumps into a woman with flaxen hair. She's thin. Light lipstick. A dress the color of a peach. She smiles at Bucky and apologizes, then introduces herself. Bucky almost fumbles. It's been a while, a long while. Between the missions and the letters, he's hardly given much thought to picking up women. He wipes his hand dry on his jacket and takes the woman's hand to kiss it. Her skin is soft. Her name is Irene.

He buys her a drink and introduces her to Gale, who is perfectly polite but quiet otherwise, chewing on a toothpick. Bucky has brought him another ginger beer even though Gale hasn't finished his first, like he's apologizing for something. He has no idea for what.

Bucky and Irene go around the back of the pub during closing while Gale waits for him out front. Bucky gives her a kiss on the cheek as they get to the street and part, turns and finds Gale watching him, expression stony, before he fixes his face and calls for Bucky, tells him they need to get back or they're going to miss curfew.

A sense of guilt starts chewing at Bucky immediately. It ruins his high from the night. There's nothing for Bucky to feel guilty for, that's what he keeps telling himself, only he swears Gale had looked at him like

he was disappointed or upset or something. And maybe Bucky was thinking about the letters a little when he and Irene went around to the back, but they've been on his mind a lot.

The chewing turns to gnawing by the time they're back at base. Gale's quiet isn't helping. Bucky stops him outside their quarters, eyes on his shoes. They're scuffed. Gale's aren't.

"I'm a bad person, aren't I?" he says.

He hears Gale shift next to him, the soles of his shoes scraping against the gravel.

"No, you're not," Gale says.

Bucky clicks his tongue, smiles. It's rueful. Gale has him by the shoulder in the next second, forcing Bucky to look at him.

"Hey. You're *not*." Gale is close. His breath smells spicy from the ginger beer. "You're a good man, Bucky Egan. You're a damn fine pilot and you're my best friend."

Bucky doesn't know how to respond to that. Gale is so rarely open with his words and affections. It makes Bucky feel a little watery, in a way he can't blame on the alcohol. He ghosts a laugh, knows he's unable to disguise how sincere his response is about to be.

"Buck, you'll make a fella blush, talking like that," he says.

Gale rolls his eyes immediately, but Bucky swears his cheeks are dusted pink in the dim light outside their quarters. His hand is still on Bucky's shoulder. Bucky grabs his wrist. Gale's skin is cool from the night air.

"Hey," Bucky says. "We good?"

"Always," Gale says.

He says it like a vow.

The letters keep coming. Smudged with lipstick, perfumed with

Chantilly. A nameless woman telling Bucky how she longs to kiss him, her thoughts, words Bucky can't reply to yet feels deeply connected to. He takes himself in his hand in the woods a few times and comes thinking about it. Thinking about how Gale's jaw still twitches every time mail call happens. He doesn't say anything, and he listens whenever Bucky recounts the letters, but he disappears after, and Bucky doesn't know where he goes. The weirdness Bucky thought they had resolved the night he slept with Irene seems to be resolutely unresolved.

War is beyond hell, his admirer writes him one time. *The hollowed faces of the men I see, the rubble of ruined buildings.*

Another time she writes him that she wants to run her fingers through his hair, among other things. *I want, simply. Some days all I do is want.*

"Do you think it's possible to love someone you've never met?" Bucky asks Gale, the two of them biking back to their quarters.

Gale is silent for a long time. Bucky listens to the wind whip through the tires of their bikes, the bikes he won for them.

"Maybe," Gale says.

That's not the answer Bucky was expecting him to give. Gale was supposed to say, *No, of course not,* so Bucky could tell him to prove it, and they could get into a good-natured debate that would end with Gale doling out a long-suffering glance. But Gale has been on edge these days. Not from the war—Gale is weirdly unflappable in that way, never shows what he's feeling to the men, only lets his guard drop when he's around Bucky, and even then he's nearly impenetrable—the way he acts when Bucky talks about the letters he gets, Bucky could almost dare to call him *jealous.*

"Ah, you're right," Bucky says.

They brake and park their bikes. There's rain coming in from the north, thunder rumbling across the sky. Bucky feels bad now, talking about the letters so much. There's no reason he should. Gale is his best friend and only that. He's the one Bucky should be talking to the most about this.

"It's nice, that's all, getting letters. Guess you were right. But I'll deny it if you tell anyone I said that."

Gale laughs, the sound overlapping with a roll of thunder. Bucky

hasn't made him laugh in a minute.

"I'll keep my lips sealed," he says, then licks over his lips. "Bucky—"

The sky opens up before he can finish, rain coming down in sheets. They duck inside, swearing and bumping into each other. The rain sounds even louder hitting the roof, like pellets, or empty shell casings. Gale shakes off his jacket. There are droplets of rain on his face, Bucky watches one slide down to the tip of his nose before it falls silently to the floor. Bucky wipes his face dry with his sleeve.

"You were saying?"

"Nothing," Gale says.

He smells like ozone when he walks past Bucky.

He gets another letter next mail call. Everyone whistles when Bucky grabs the envelope, cracking jokes about him going somewhere private, like they all don't. But these letters have become legendary. His secret admirer. Everyone saying how Bucky's got his very own Marlene Dietrich writing him love letters. Bucky pretends to ignore them, smiling, and goes outside and thumbs the letter open.

The smell of cologne hits him immediately. Bucky thinks for a moment that he's caught it on the wind until he sniffs the letter. It's unmistakable. Gale's cologne, spritzed on a letter from his secret admirer. Bucky's vision blurs briefly before the loopy cursive comes back into focus, the address of *Dear John Egan.* The letter goes into great detail about how much she's missed him and wishes she could catch sight of him again at the pub, just to look at his face. *Yours Always,* the bottom of the letter says, followed a kiss mark.

Bucky stares at the kiss mark. Those are Gale's lips. It's so obvious to him now. How she can't dance. How much she knows about farms. The shyness. That's all *Gale.* Bucky folds the letter back into its envelope and starts walking. He can't feel his legs.

"Hey," DeMarco says. "What did you get this week?"

A few guys walk over, expectant. Bucky breezes right past them. He's all gassed up, only the more he walks, the less Bucky is sure about what he's feeling. He slows down at the edge of the airstrip and pulls the letter out again. Smells it again. Bucky catches sight of Gale walking out of his quarters and his heart jolts in his chest. He watches him place a toothpick between his lips and keep moving, the wind ruffling the collar of his sheepskin. Gale, who's been writing Bucky letters for months. And the only reason for it that Bucky can think of doesn't make sense.

Did he mean for Bucky to find out? Is that why there's cologne on this letter?

Bucky catches up with him, the weight of the letter in his jacket pocket suddenly heavy. Gale smiles when he approaches. Bucky catches the scent of his cologne and swallows.

"You got some time tonight?" he asks. "Need to talk to you."

Gale waits for him to elaborate. Bucky doesn't.

"Sure," Gale says, brows furrowing.

Bucky walks away before he can ask any questions and avoids him the rest of the day, even at dinner. He finds it easy to do so. A lot of things that were bubbled up in him ready to spill over earlier have completely evaporated. Bucky eats without thinking about it. He waits while Gale showers. He's calm, strangely calm. It's not until late night, when the base has quieted down, and Bucky and Gale shimmy up into Bucky's fort together that Bucky is hit with a wave of frustration so intense he shoves Gale hard enough that he stumbles into the navigator's desk. Nearly topples over it.

"Jesus, Bucky," Gale says. "What's your problem?"

"*My* problem?"

Bucky sets down his lantern, reaches into his jacket and pulls the letter out. He hands it to Gale.

"Smell that," he says.

The color drains from Gale's face. The smell of his cologne is already sharp inside the nose of the fort.

"I've got—" Bucky pulls the other letters out and holds them up in his

fist. "—ten other letters. All from you, Buck."

He hands those over too, crushes them against Gale's chest. The two of them crouched awkwardly in the nose of the plane. Gale clutches at them but some fall to his feet. His face looks drawn up and hurt, *embarrassed.* He hasn't said anything and it's making Bucky feel crazier. He scrubs his palm over his mouth.

"What the hell were you thinking? I'd ask if this was some elaborate prank, but I know you, Gale."

"You weren't supposed to find out," Gale says, the scrape of his voice quiet.

He's staring at the letters still clutched close to his chest, and Bucky notices for the first time that he's having a hard time looking at him. Gale looks unsure and afraid, two looks Bucky has never seen on him before. Bucky doesn't know what's worse—Gale accidentally revealing himself by using the wrong bottle, or Gale lying to him in the first place. And he still doesn't know why.

"I knew you wanted a letter," Gale says. "What you said the night we came home from the pub. You looked so down, Bucky. Just—I only meant to write it the one time."

"But you didn't. You wrote more." Bucky grabs a letter that fell and opens it up, makes Gale look. "Christ, Buck, you perfumed them. You fucking kissed them."

"I *know*—"

"I jerked off to those letters."

He doesn't say it to be cruel, but Gale has to know how much this has truly fucked with him. Gale curls in on himself a little at the words. Not in disgust, Bucky thinks. He's rubbing his right index finger along one of the envelopes. He looks guilty, uncomfortable with himself. Bucky inhales shakily.

"Did you mean it?"

Gale's eyes find his easily, even in the near dark. Bucky isn't sure he's breathing. Choked feeling in his chest at the thought of Gale's answer, but he'd be a liar if he didn't admit this is what he really wanted to know. He doesn't think Gale pities him. At least, he never thought he did. Right now, Bucky doesn't know what Gale feels anymore.

"Everything you wrote, did you mean it?" Bucky asks. "Or were you just pretending?"

There's a long, terrible silence, not even the night making a sound around them, before Gale says, "I wasn't pretending."

He drops the rest of the letters, and Bucky doesn't understand why until he understands that Gale is about to try and leave. He understands too much in that moment. That Gale wrote everything he'd never write as himself, *could* never write as himself. All the things Gale put in those letters are things he'll never say, and Bucky wonders now when Gale realized he even wanted to. The second he steps a foot forward, Bucky pulls him in by the front of his sheepskin and kisses him. Gale pulls back gasping. Says his name.

"Shut up for a second," Bucky says, and kisses him again.

Gale kisses him back this time. Hesitant, sweet kisses that turn frantic the longer they've got their mouths on each other. It's Gale who slides his hands inside of Bucky's jacket and takes hold of his hips. And it's Gale who pulls Bucky close enough that their crotches are shoved together. Bucky walks them back until Gale is about to tumble over the navigator's table again. He unzips Gale's jacket.

"All that stuff you wrote," he says. "My god, Buck, I thought you were jealous every time I told you about those letters."

"I was," Gale says, gasping when Bucky sucks briefly at his jaw. "You didn't know it was me."

Bucky thinks about Gale silent while everyone was whistling at the thought of Bucky having a secret admirer, how it must have just been eating him up inside, and desire pulls in him so tightly his mouth fills with saliva. He needs their clothes off. He needs to see Gale the way he's been wanting to see him and thought he never would.

He spins Gale around and plasters himself to his back as he unbuttons his shirt so he can have better access to his neck.

"You can't—can't leave a mark," Gale says.

"Not where anyone will see," Bucky says. "Just me. Just us."

Gale turns around before Bucky can finish unbuttoning his shirt and kisses him again, wet and open-mouthed. They go for each other's belts at the same time, laughing nervously into the stale air of the fort.

Bucky keeps wondering how far this can go. Gale has always been so untouchable to him that he can barely believe this is happening now. He slides a hand into Gale's underwear and finds him leaking. Bucky groans.

"I want to fuck you so bad," he says, then bites his lip. "I'm sorry, Jesus, I just—"

"Do you know how?" Gale's voice is tentative but dripping with want.

Bucky shudders, Gale's hands too tight on his hips. He strokes Gale once just to feel, has to know what it's like when Gale thrusts into his palm and tries to bite back a moan. He pulls his hand from Gale's underwear and kisses the corner of his mouth.

"Get your pants off," he says. "Bend over the table. I'll be right back."

He climbs up to the cockpit and grabs the jar of Vaseline left over from the last time he'd jerked off up here and goes back to the nose to find Gale naked from the waist down, knees pillowed on his jacket. He's resting on his elbows over the navigator's table, eyes catching on the jar of Vaseline.

"Hey there," he says, looking stupid beautiful, nervous smile on his face.

Bucky bends down and kisses him, lets his hand drift over the bare skin of Gale's ass. He pulls his pants down and coats two fingers in Vaseline, warms it on his fingers, then kisses the cleft of Gale's ass briefly.

"You tell me if it hurts," he says.

He slips a finger between Gale's cheeks and finds him clenched up, trembling, hot to the touch. Bucky presses at the hot furl of him just to get Gale used to the feeling, hears him inhale sharply.

"Did you go out and buy that perfume?" he asks.

"Nothing wrong with a man buying perfume."

Gale's voice is taught. Bucky rubs over his stomach, finds his half-hard cock and strokes. Gale moans and Bucky pushes his finger in, then out, then in again. He trusts that Gale will tell him if it's too much and doesn't embarrass him by asking. He toys with his hole like that for a while, crooking his finger and searching out the spot he knows is

there.

"And the lipstick too?" he asks.

He circles a second finger around the rim, then pulls the first out and dips both back in. Gale's whole body shakes when he does. Bucky is surprised when he pushes back into his hand, trying to draw him a little deeper.

"Might have stolen that," Gale says.

"*Buck*," Bucky says, voice full of reverence.

He crooks his fingers again and finds what he's looking for. Gale scrambles forward, moan echoing through the fort.

"Bucky," he says. "Jesus, Bucky, that feels good."

Bucky nods even though Gale can't see. He works Gale up to three fingers, until Gale is leaking into his fist again, fucking himself on his fingers like it's all he knows, and Bucky is worried that he's going to come all over himself before he even gets inside of him. When he pulls his fingers out, Gale sighs. Bucky mouths at his jaw. Slicks himself. He thinks about Gale disguising his handwriting and awkwardly applying lipstick—for him, just for him—and pushes the blunt head of his cock into Gale's body.

"Oh fuck," he says, shocked at the tightness. Of being inside Gale.

He pauses, one hand caught up in the creased shirt of Gale's uniform, then fucks deeper into him, listens as Gale chokes on a moan and takes it. Takes him. And once Bucky is fully inside of him, that's it. He wants to stay there. He's almost content not to move, except for the burning need to drive himself deeper. He rolls his hips and feels Gale's ass flush against his pelvis. How hot he is around him.

"Tell me where you wrote the letters," he says. "I gotta know, Buck."

"In my fort," Gale says, rocking back against him. "While you were asleep."

Bucky folds himself over Gale's back, thrusting tight into his body.

"Wearing your stolen lipstick? God, I wish I could've seen you. Bet you looked real pretty."

Gale doesn't answer. He turns his head to the side and Bucky kisses

him, the two of them panting into each other's mouths. He's never seen Gale so undone before. The thought of Gale stealing lipstick, sneaking up to his fort to write Bucky love letters—Bucky pushes Gale's open collar aside and bites Gale's shoulder to stop himself from blurting out the three words he really shouldn't say. He has to leave a mark somewhere to prove this happened. Gale whines under him, clenches down. Bucky moans into his skin, helpless, and licks at the taste of sweat there, tongues the teeth marks he's left behind.

He finds Gale's cock again, hard and warm, and strokes him. Gale grabs hold of Bucky's hair, the two of them moving up to their knees so that Gale is seated in Bucky's lap. Bucky can feel him panting now, the movement of his back muscles. It pulls Bucky deeper into his body. His free hand travels up Gale's stomach, finds his nipple and pinches. Gale arches forward, then back, hips working, a litany of bitten off moans.

"God, Buck, you feel amazing," Bucky says. "Want to come inside you. Can I?"

Gale nods, eyes shut, lips bitten red. Bucky swears he can see a trace of lipstick there. He can't stop himself from pressing his mouth to Gale's neck and saying, "Did you ever imagine you were her?"

"*John*," Gale says, gasping.

Not denying it. Grinding down onto his cock.

"Yeah, that's it," Bucky says. "That's my good girl."

"Oh *fuck*—"

Gale comes all over Bucky's hand, body going rigid. He clenches down so hard that Bucky's orgasm hits him immediately after like a gut punch. He says, "Gale, *Jesus Christ*." Then Gale is loose and limp in his lap.

For a while neither of them moves at all. They just sit there together panting. Bucky's legs are going numb underneath Gale's weight, but like hell he's about to say anything. He keeps his arms wrapped around Gale's stomach and feels himself start to leak out of Gale's hole. The nose of the fort feels humid now. Gale finally shifts, mumbles something about feeling messy, and Bucky laughs, helps him ease off his cock. Gale grabs a handkerchief from the pocket of his discarded sheepskin and wipes at his stomach before handing it over to Bucky.

"You good?" Bucky asks.

"Not about to pretend we didn't just have sex over your navigator's table, if that's what you mean," Gale says.

He lets Bucky clean him between his legs, surprisingly obedient. Bucky isn't sure *what* he means. Gale's love letters are scattered all over the floor along with most of their clothes. They get dressed quickly and make sure the fort is cleaned up. By the time they're ready to leave, Gale looks completely put together other than a few creases in his shirt and pants. Before he opens the hatch, Gale grabs his hand.

"You meant it, didn't you?" he says. "What you said to me the night before you shipped out. You really wanted a letter from me."

Bucky feels himself blush. The whole night he's kept it together, and now he blushes. Admitting that feels close to admitting something else entirely. Close to saying *I love you.*

"We have to go, Buck," he says, and opens the hatch door.

He's leaving Harding's office the next day and finds Gale waiting for him. He doesn't say a word, just walks in step with Bucky until they reach the jeep and climbs in beside him. Bucky can read the nervous energy rolling off Gale, so he doesn't say a thing either. He drives until they're on the far side of the airfield. He lets the jeep idle and adjusts his cap.

They haven't seen each other since last night and haven't gotten a chance to talk. Bucky was up earlier than usual this morning because he didn't sleep at all, kept sneaking glances at Gale's form and wondering if it was the same for him. Wondered if Gale would press his fingers to the bruise Bucky left on his shoulder. Maybe he didn't want to look at all. Bucky hated having to shower Gale's smell from his body. Hated being away from him. Now that they're finally alone, Bucky feels stupidly tongue-tied.

Because maybe Gale doesn't want to look at a bruise and remember.

"Well," Bucky says, then cuts himself off.

Gale still hasn't said a thing. He clears his throat, then reaches into his jacket and pulls out an envelope. Hands it over to him. It's not postmarked. Bucky's name is written on the back in Gale's unmistakable script. He looks up. Gale watches him, an unmistakable fondness in his eyes, but he still looks nervous. It makes him boyish and beautiful in a different way. Bucky thumbs the letter open. There are only four lines written there:

Dear Bucky,

I mean it too.

Yours Always,
Buck Cleven

End Notes

gale up in his fort at 2am furiously writing bucky love letters while getting jealous of his own girlsona: i am not queer!! *puts on lipstick*

this is for jen because i joked about it in the DMs and then we kept joking about it and suddenly it became Not A Joke. also she gave me the cold cream mask line!! ily angel~

thanks for reading i'm on tumblr @stereobone xx

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